

Ruthven in Badenoch: the excavation of a Highland garrison

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with contributions by D Gallagher & R McCullagh

ABSTRACT

Excavations in 1983 brought to light physical evidence for the later medieval castle, including the well, and shed new light on the layout of the military barracks which replaced it after the 1715 Jacobite Rising. The project was funded by Historic Scotland.

INTRODUCTION

Ruthven Barracks (NGR: NN 765 997) is situated on a fluvio-glacial terrace at OD 236 m, overlooking the wide alluvial plain of the River Spey. It lies 1.6 km SSE of Kingussie within the parish of Ruthven in Inverness-shire (illus 1).

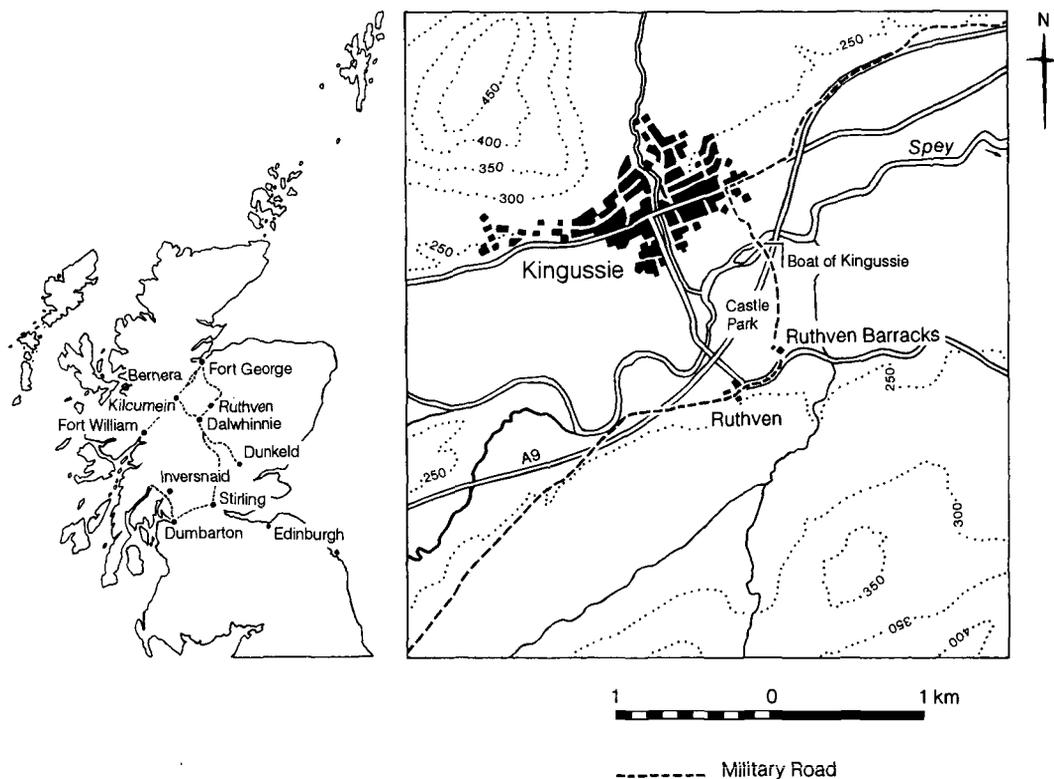
The post-glacial terrace upon which the ruins stand has been artificially contoured over the years to its present profile; flat topped and with equally displaced slopes commanding a strategic position in Strath Spey (illus 2). The terrace itself is well drained, owing to its sand and gravel composition, while the surrounding alluvial plain of the Spey is very prone to flooding throughout the year giving rise to an impenetrable morass in the environs.

The standing remains of the barracks came into the care of the Secretary of State for Scotland in 1968. Extensive consolidation of the masonry has since been carried out on the barracks, which were in a state of considerable disrepair. Archaeological examination of the barracks complex was carried out for Historic Scotland's predecessor department in 1983 to elucidate certain aspects of its plan prior to the implementation of a scheme for its presentation to the public.

HISTORICAL SUMMARY

There is no evidence of occupation on the terrace before the 13th century when the site was chosen as the caput, or chief seat, of the Comyns, in their Badenoch lordship. The castle may have been built of stone but, unlike the other major Comyn strongholds, for example Inverlochy, in Lochaber, and Lochindorb, near Forres, there is no early medieval masonry standing at Ruthven. In the later 14th century the castle was in the possession of Alexander Stewart, the notorious 'Wolf of Badenoch', who acquired the lordship of Badenoch in 1374 from his father Robert II; but on his death without male issue, the lordship reverted to the Crown (Macpherson

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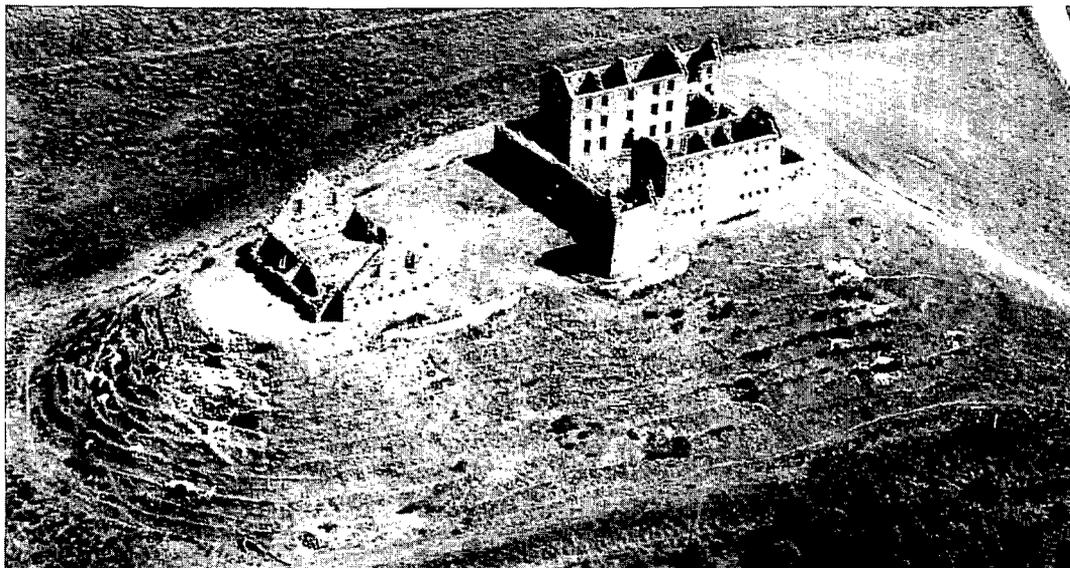


ILLUS 1 The location of Ruthven Barracks and the other Highland garrisons; dashed lines show 18th-century military roads

1893, 366). In 1451, John, Earl of Ross, stormed the castle and reduced it to a partial ruin. Shortly after, the ruined structure and its lands came into the possession of the Gordons and, towards the end of the 16th century, George Gordon, 6th Earl of Huntly, erected a replacement castle. It is said that he 'built the castle twice, it being burnt by adventure or negligence of his servants after he once finished the same' (*ibid*, 372).

In 1647 General Leslie laid siege to, and captured, the castle, then under the captaincy of the Macphersons. In 1649 the castle was again attacked, and afterwards garrisoned, by the English under Cromwell. The Duke of Gordon was granted the lordship of Badenoch in 1685 but in 1689 a pro-Williamite garrison, housed in the castle, came under attack from Graham of Claverhouse, who laid it to ruin. The last descriptive account of the pre-barracks buildings was given by a scholar at the local school of Ruthven. In it he described the strongly built masonry which then stood on the terrace (Shaw 1775, 225).

In 1669 Parliament recommended that a garrison be stationed at Ruthven. The proposal was not taken up immediately but construction work did begin in 1719, following the Jacobite Rising of 1715. The building was completed by September 1721. One of four new Highland garrisons, Ruthven housed infantry whose task was to police the locality. A contemporary Board of Ordnance plan (illus 3) details the proposed fortification and barracks facilities. A stable block, for use by dragoons patrolling the new roads, was added in 1734 on Major-General George Wade's instruction. The garrison saw no great military action; its first encounter with hostile



ILLUS 2 Ruthven Barracks from the air (*Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland*
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forces in 1745–6 was its last. An account of the siege and eventual surrender of the barracks was related by the Irish sergeant left in command of the small garrison of men (Buist 1930, 241–50).

A full descriptive account of the barracks buildings at Ruthven is given by Stell (1983, 20–30), who also provides a historical summary of all four Highland garrisons, at Bernera, Kilcumiein, Inversnaid and Ruthven (see illus 1), which were designed and built on similar architectural lines. The wider historical and architectural context of Ruthven is given by Tabraham & Grove (1995).

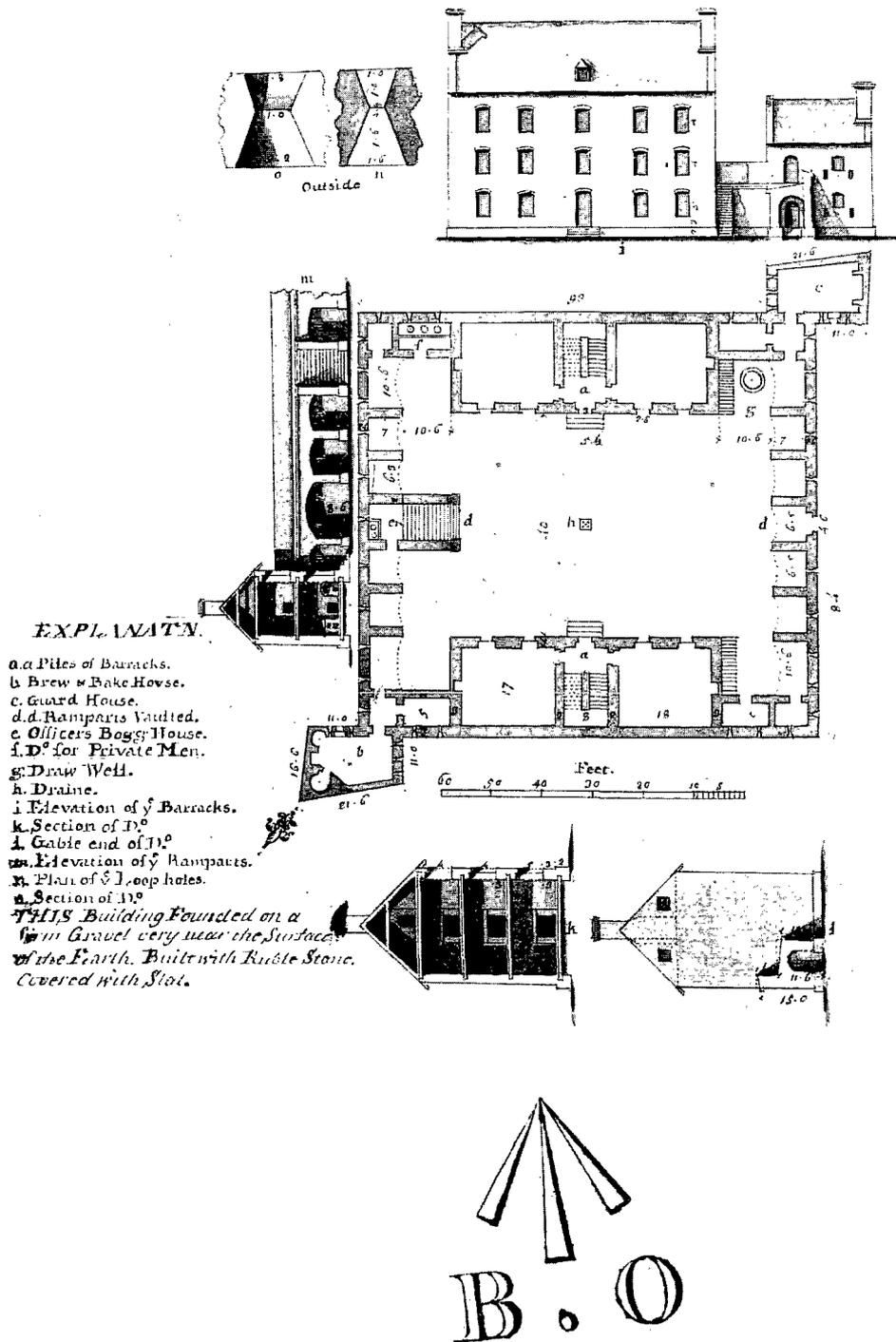
THE EXCAVATIONS

AREA I: CASEMATES (ILLUS 6)

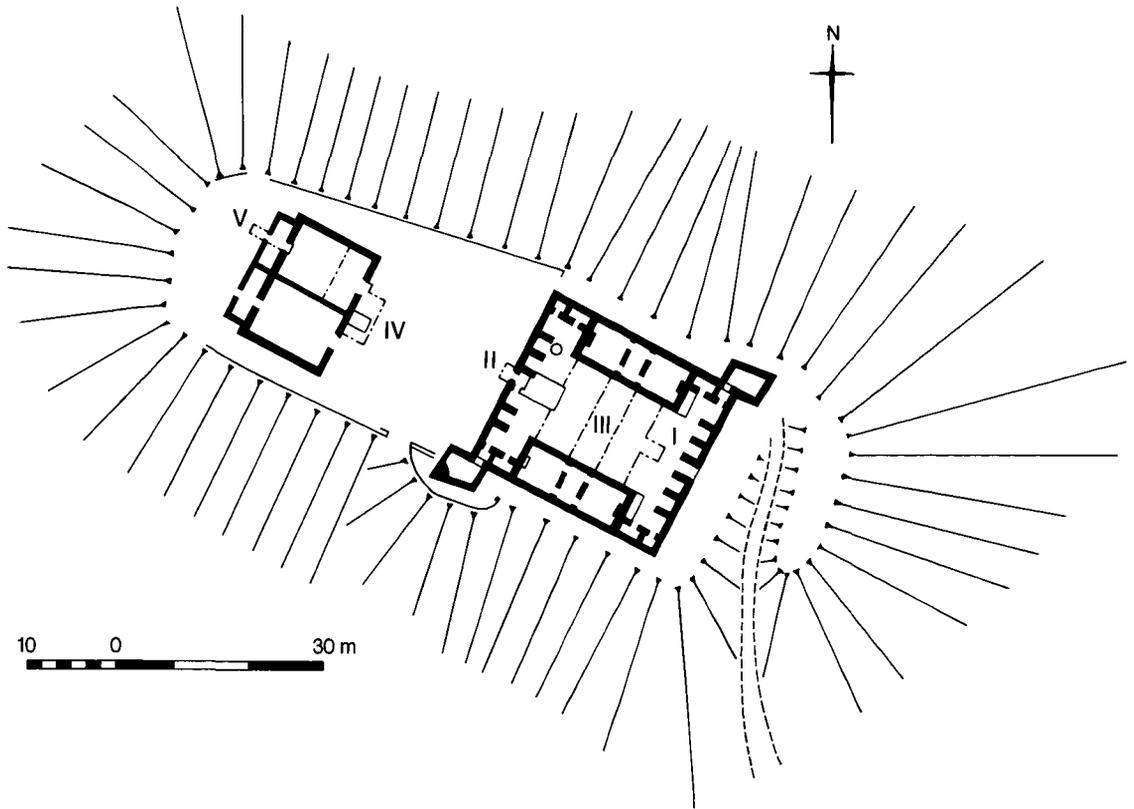
In the east half of the parade ground, the area was limited by the enclosure wall on the east angle and vaults on the north and south angles. Once turf and topsoil had been removed little destruction debris was found other than keystones and voussoirs which had fallen from the casemate roofs. They overlay a near-uniform layer of well-sorted yellow sand (Feature 13) into which a patchy gravel aggregate (14) had been pressed. This aggregate appeared to be the surviving remains of a heavily eroded parade ground co-existent with the entrance cobbling (16). The aggregate did not extend into the six casemates which abut the enclosure wall; instead there were thin deposits of disturbed humic sand immediately above the yellow bedding sand.

The casemates in this area and throughout the barracks complex have a scarcement on the internal faces. This course exists at a uniform height and is chamfered along the front elevations of the two barracks blocks and behind forestairs where it does not act as a supporting feature, merely a crude decoration. A wooden step up onto a firing position, which probably rested on this scarcement (illus 7), was suggested by an intermittent mortar level clinging to the internal surfaces of each casemate. This mortar was present at similar heights above the robbed threshold levels in the guardhouse, the adjoining vault entrances, and on the southern vaults. There was also a mortar level against each of the two forestairs (6 & 7). These stairs gave access to the upper level of the enclosure wall, along which would have been a wall-walk, since destroyed. The northern forestair was rendered on its dressed faces to its surviving height of 1.2 m. A loosely

THE FORT OF BADENOCH.



ILLUS 3 Board of Ordnance plan of the proposed barracks, 1719–20. (© Trustees of the National Library of Scotland)



ILLUS 4 Plan of the barracks, showing the areas excavated in 1983

consolidated rubble core filled the space between the barracks gable and the retaining wall. Little can be said about the construction of the southern forestairs, which suffered considerable damage during the consolidation of the east gable of the south barracks block. The corner of the barracks was rebuilt from foundation level in the 1970s; its reconstruction trench (2) was dug 2.1 m below the scarcement level.

The entrance cobbling (16) has suffered similar damage to the south forestairs during the rebuilding of the main threshold level, but nevertheless a substantial amount of the surface remained intact, laid in well-sorted yellow sand, similar to that (13) which overspread the east part of the parade ground. The river-washed pebbles, known locally as 'cassies', provided a hard-wearing threshold entrance beyond the dressed stone flags within the main doorway. This entrance was presumably a short vaulted passage.

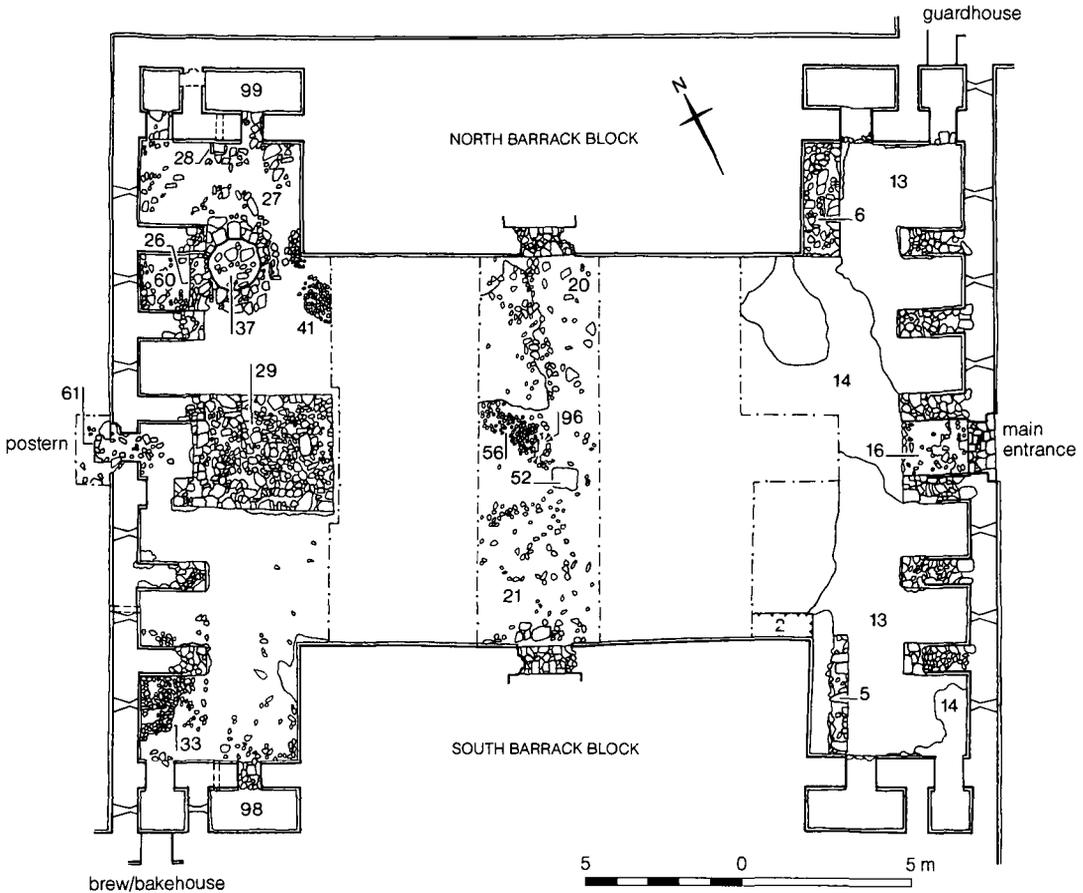
An exploratory trench within the casemate immediately to the north of the entrance was excavated in order to establish the full height of the casemate walls. Relatively thick deposits of disturbed sands and gravels had been backfilled against the main enclosure wall to a depth of some 800 mm below the entrance cobbling (16) at threshold level. These sands overlay a homogeneous, thin level of mortar extending 6 m west of the enclosure wall, presumably reflecting a construction phase.

AREA II: CASEMATES (ILLUS 5 & 6)

The six casemates along the west wall were almost identical to those in the east wall but for the postern gate inserted in 1734 as part of Wade's building programme. No obvious parade ground level remained, except for a patchy cobbled area (33/27) and a crudely flagged surface surrounding the small drain (28) leading



ILLUS 5 The western casemates under excavation (Area II)



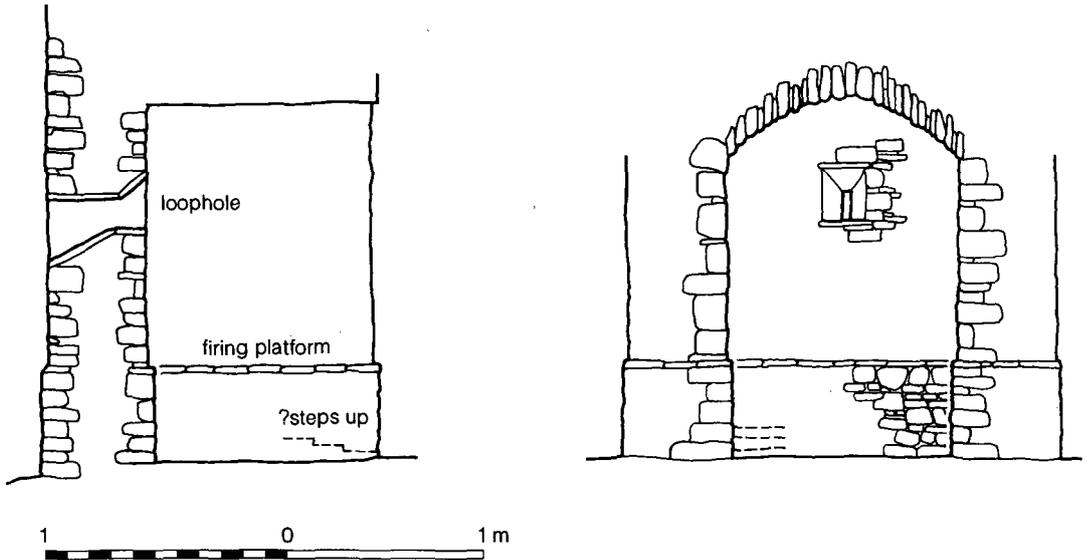
ILLUS 6 Excavation plan of the casemates and parade ground (from left, Areas II, III & I)

into the enlisted men's latrines ('boghouse') in the north-west corner. These surfaces all exhibited uniform wear on their upper faces and were at levels similar to each other and to those of the thresholds within the officers' and men's latrines (98 & 99).

The cobbling (33) at the entrance to the brewhouse and bakehouse in the south-west corner may have been the only instance where a purposely laid surface within the west casemated area had been compacted, providing a similar arrangement to the patchy surface in the east casemates (14). The threshold within the doorway through the western casemated area had been removed; consequently the aggregate levels were proud of these entrances.

The main forestairs (29) was the only means of access to the wall-walk on this west side of the compound; in turn, the wall-walk gave access to the officers' room above the brewhouse and bakehouse. The wallwalk survived to a height of 500 mm above the flagged pavement which was over the casemates. The forestairs, built at right angles to the compound wall, was faced and rendered on all four sides with a loosely consolidated rubble core behind the retaining walls. This rubble was probably masonry from an earlier building, judging by the differing types of mortar adhering to the stone infill.

An opening at the south-west corner of the stair was presumably the original entrance to the officers' 'boghouse'. With the insertion of the stable block in 1734, however, this facility was removed to the south-west vault and the present postern gate inserted in the enclosure wall. The foundations of a single step down (61) were found within a small trench opened outside this back door, although an account of the 1746 attack



ILLUS 7 Profile and elevation of a casemate

on the barracks refers to two steps out at this point (Bell 1898, 185). No method of barring this door is obvious in either of the jambs and, similarly, no evidence for an earlier latrine unit was found in the area behind the forestair.

The well (37) was approximately 1.2 m in diameter internally, crudely dressed with minimal mortar pointing in the upper two courses. The uppermost course of the well surround had been partly robbed but appeared to have been no higher than the crosswall (26) which links the two nearby casemate piers. A patch of cobbling (60) lay within this casemate. Two diametrically opposed recesses, lying east/west in the top course of the well, could have been the bedding positions for large posts, perhaps part of a timber superstructure, incorporating a windlass for drawing water. For safety reasons the well was excavated to a depth of only about 2 m; the water table is probably about 16 m below this level. A loosely cobbled surface (41) set in a dark, stone-free soil to the east of the well was probably the bottom of a drain sloping away from the casemate positions to take spillage away from the well area.

AREA III: PARADE GROUND (ILLUS 4 & 6)

Two trenches excavated within the parade ground revealed the disturbed nature of its surface: it was obvious that the central area had been landscaped since the garrison was abandoned in the 18th century. This was further illustrated by the cobbled drain (56) which terminated at a sump (96) in the centre of the parade ground, for the cover of the sump — a large square schist slab (52) — had been displaced from its rightful position. The cobbled surface (41) in Area II may also have been part of the same drainage system.

AREA IV: NORTH STABLE & FORESTAIR (ILLUS 4 & 8)

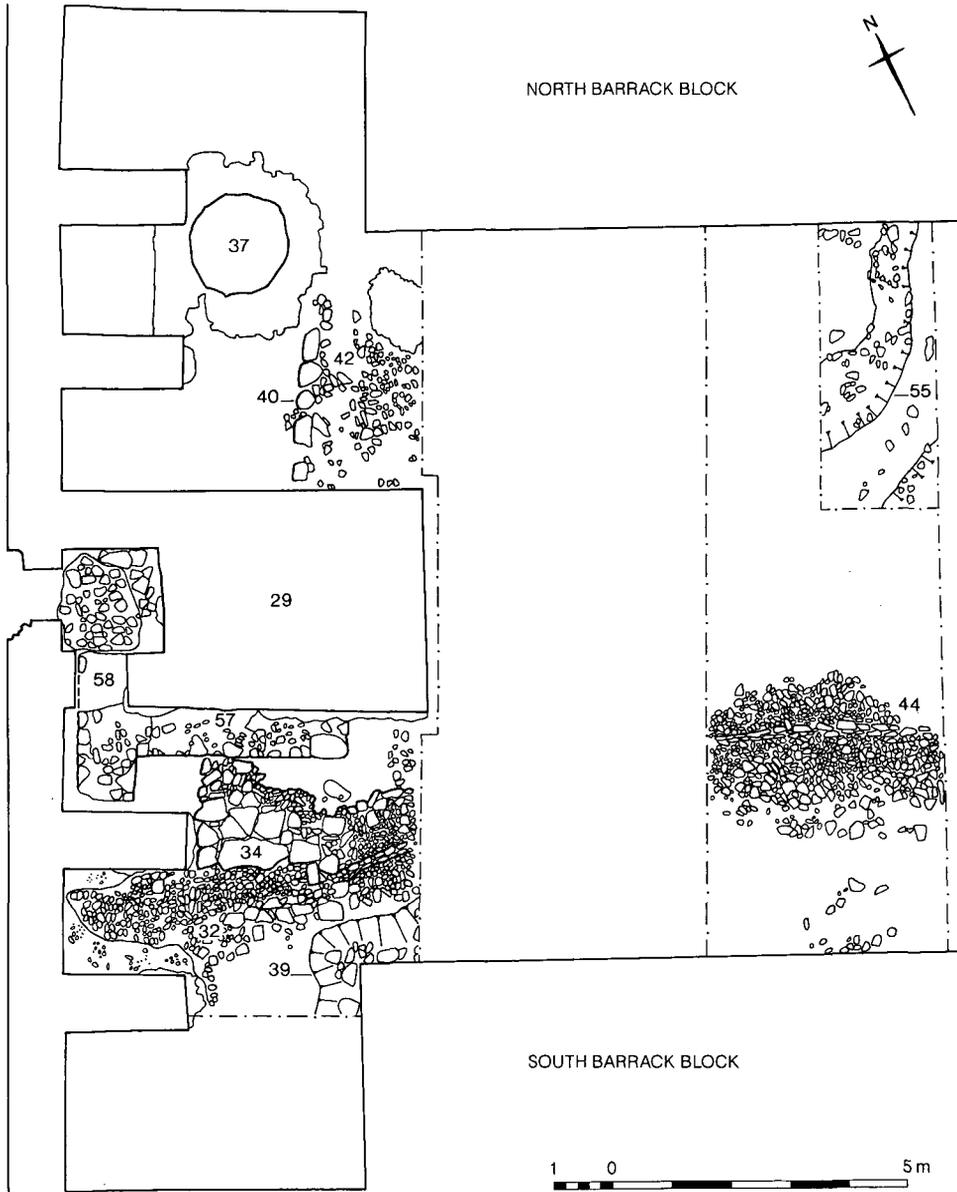
A substantial area of well-laid cobbles survived beneath a shallow overburden of burnt timber and roofing slates within the stable walls (illus 9). The surface was of tightly laid river-washed 'cassies' bedded in a well-sorted ochre sand. A central ridge with pronounced camber was flanked on either side by parallel drains serving the horse stalls, the drainage gullies apparently sloping westwards. Several burnt timbers (see McCullagh, below), sunk within the densely packed cobbles, reflect the dimensions of the wooden stalls once positioned along each wall. Extrapolating the evidence recovered from this small area, the total number



ILLUS 8 Excavation plan of the stables (Areas IV & V)



ILLUS 9 The cobbled surface within the northern stable (Area IV)



ILLUS 10 Excavation plan of the medieval remains (Areas II & III)

of stalls within each stable would be 14, catering for a total complement of 28 horses, and not 30 as is generally stated.

The entrance to the stable was through a large two-leaf door, 1.8 m wide, over a threshold stone, since removed. A concentration of window glass in the vicinity of the entrance suggested that the stable door had window lights above.

Immediately outside the entrance, and adjacent to the stable and forestair walls, was a tightly cobbled apron which presumably extended the length of the east range. A small drain ran through the width of the forestair taking excess water off the cobbles. Beyond the cobbles a tamped aggregate provided a well-drained

surface, perhaps serving as a mustering area for the dragoons. Two post-holes (95 & 75), equidistant from the stable wall, may have held wooden uprights carrying a timber tethering rail: another post-hole (77), to the south of the forestair, probably served a similar purpose. Two stone-packed post-holes (72 & 73), either side of the forestair (64), may have housed the supports for a wooden banister or handrail, straddling the stone stair which gave access to the haylofts above the stables (Longmuir 1860, 164).

AREA V: TACKROOM & REAR ENTRANCE (ILLUS 4 & 8)

The cobbled floor of the stable extended westwards as a corridor into the tackroom. The north chamber of the tackroom was flagged with irregularly shaped stones and cobbles partly mortared. As in the stable, the cobbles were overlain by a thin deposit of burnt roof timbers and slates with numerous nails of assorted sizes amongst this destruction material.

A cobbled apron (92) lay outside the west wall of the stable block and echoed the cobble surface (68) east of the building. There were traces of a wooden door frame between the tackroom and stable and the housing for a similar frame could be seen within the faced stonework of the west door.

MEDIEVAL REMAINS (ILLUS 10 & 11)

Immediately below the main forestair (29), within the barracks compound, lay two wall remnants (57 & 58) bonded with a pink mortar and dressed on their south and west faces. They had been used as foundations for the forestair and officers' latrine, but quite clearly belonged to a pre-barracks structure, as they had been damaged by foundation trenches of the casemates and postern. The irregularly cobbled and flagged surfaces (32 & 34) would have been external features, contemporary with these earlier walls. A narrow open drain



ILLUS 11 The medieval remains below the main forestair (Area II)

with stones set on their longest axes cut through the cobbles (32) and reappears within the cobbled surface (44) in the adjacent cutting. The drain was cut by a construction trench (39) of the south barracks block, the trench being backfilled with large rounded stones and boulders, many with pink mortar adhering to them.

A linear grey mortar-bonded structure (40), with an associated dump of rubble (42), lay below the cobbled drain (41) near to the well and pertained also to an earlier building phase. It is likely that both this feature and the well are elements from the earlier castle, and that the structure was destroyed during the re-sinking of the well by the garrison builders.

Further evidence of medieval occupation was suggested by an extensive spread of mortar and rubble (55), indicative of robbed walls, in Area III. No evidence of pre-barracks structures, however, was found in Area I. A trial trench, some 2 m deep, through modern debris (2) and disturbed sands and gravels revealed no obvious horizon relating to occupation.

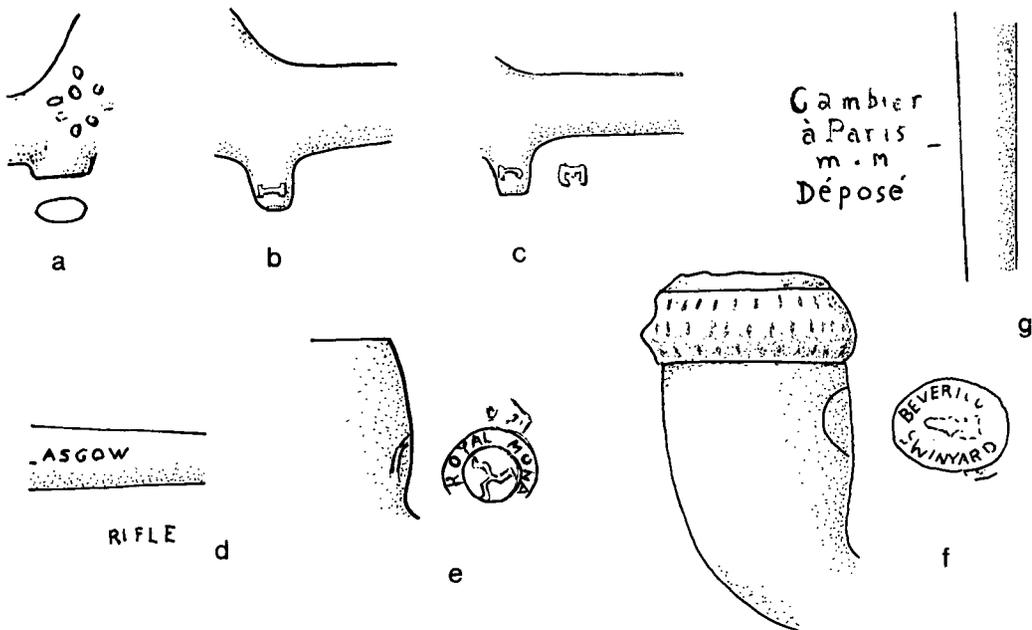
The few late medieval artefacts discovered during the excavation date to around the first half of the 16th century.

CLAY PIPES (ILLUS 12)

Dennis Gallagher

Thirty fragments of clay pipe were recovered from 11 different contexts. All the identified material is of 19th- to 20th-century date, except for one bowl fragment (a) from the pre-barracks drain (32). This is a much abraded unpolished lower bowl fragment with a dot rose on each side. It is a west Netherlands type, c 1650–70 (Duco 1981, 244, nos 36–8), a low-quality export pipe of a type that has a wide distribution throughout Scotland (Davey 1987, 280).

The 19th-century material is derived from a variety of sources. Two fragments (b & c) have maker's initials in relief on the heel, a form or marking which is rarely found after c 1850.



ILLUS 12 Clay pipe fragments

Fragment (c) with the letters J/E is probably from the Aberdeen makers John and James Elrick, active 1830–1910 (Evans 1981, 37), but is likely to date from the early years of their business. Another Scottish pipe is the stem fragment (d) with the incuse stamp (GL)ASGOW/RIFLE CUTTY. Glasgow factories produced a variety of Rifle cutties, post-1870. The short wide bowl (e) has a stamp bearing the Manx emblem surrounded by the legend ROYAL MONA and surmounted by a crown. This may also be a Scottish product, possibly similar to the ‘Isle of Man’ pipe produced by William White of Glasgow in the late 19th century (Gallagher 1987, 152). Another pipe of late 19th- or early 20th-century date is the upright bowl (f) with a metal spark cap which has a hand-impressed oval stamp bearing the names BEVERI[DGE] and SWINYARD. All major Scottish pipemakers produced Swinyard pipes, the designs inspired by the London maker of that name. This particular example is a product of William Beveridge, active in Forres 1869–82 and in Aberdeen 1882–1920 (Evans 1981, 38–9). Beveridge had a closer connection than most with Swinyard, as he possessed and presumably used a number of that maker’s original moulds (Davey 1987, 262).

A stem fragment (g) bears a mark of the Paris company of Gambier, active 1789–1920, although this particular mark was introduced c 1850 (Duco 1986, 106). It is likely to have been part of an elaborate high-quality figural pipe for which that company was famous.

TIMBER REMAINS

Roderick McCullagh

Eight samples of charcoal were submitted for analysis. These represented three main posts, two supporting posts, two stall partitions and a door sill. The posts and partitions were all from the north stable area, while the door sill was from between the north stable and connecting tackroom.

All of the identifiable samples were of Scots pine (*Pinus sylvestris*). The main posts were evidently single timbers between 250 mm and 300 mm in diameter. No bark was present, and the timbers were only partly burnt. In a sample traverse, 33 growth rings were counted in a span of 65 mm. The support post samples were single timbers between 150 mm and 250 mm in diameter. The sill was also a single timber (diameter undetermined).

CONCLUSIONS

The 1723 edition of the Board of Ordnance plans (illus 3) compares favourably with the extant structure. There are minor discrepancies in the number of gun-loops within the casemates and some differences in the vaults within each corner of the compound. The positioning of the well in the north-west as opposed to the north-east angle is perhaps accounted for by the reuse of an already existing, medieval water supply, of which the barracks’ architect was ignorant. Mackintosh (1897, 371) refers to timbers from an earlier well shaft being discovered during the rebuilding of the well.

According to the Board of Ordnance elevation the parade ground lay 2 ft (960 mm) below the scarcement. No evidence of such a level was found during the excavation, but this could easily be explained by the removal of a formal paved or metalled surface from the parade ground after the destruction of 1746. A tenancy for the rental of Barrack Hill of Ruthven existed before 1796 (R Noble, pers comm) and the subsequent grazing of cattle and sheep, which still continues, may have contributed to the erosion of the mound.

The cobbling in the stable block and stalls is similar to that found in mains farms and other large houses of the 18th and early 19th centuries. In this respect, Ruthven appears unique for its

time for it had not undergone 'improvement' (R Noble, pers comm). The lack of evidence for a farrier's smithy is curious. Such an ancillary service may have been located in the unexcavated recess of the tackroom, although this chamber does appear rather small.

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